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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 006275

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MX CA

SUBJECT: CALDERON WOOS, WOWS, OTTAWA

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR ALAN D. MELTZER, REASONS: 1.4(B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: President-elect Felipe Calderon's October 26-27 visit to Ottawa exceeded expectations on both sides, with Calderon winning over both his public and private sector interlocutors. Canadian embassy contacts tell us he impressed his Ottawa contacts with his energy, intelligence and confidence, and succeeded in developing a particularly good personal rapport with PM Harper. Our Canadian contacts emphasized, however, that the Mexicans seemed far more interested in optics than in substance: the Canadians were surprised Calderon did not raise the issue of NAFTA's agricultural provisions -- scheduled to go into effect in 2008 -- or of the North American Development Fund, a subject that has captured Calderon's attention in the past. He did not even address the issue of the proposed fence on the U.S.-Mexican border until asked about it at a press appearance. On an unrelated matter, Canada and Mexico are scheduled to hold a one day round of security and defense cooperation talks in Mexico City on November 6. End summary.

Political Soulmates in the Making?

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¶2. (C) According to contacts in the Canadian embassy here, Calderon's meeting with Canadian PM Harper began with a one-on-one session that lasted longer than scheduled. When aides joined the two leaders for a longer session, they found the two leaders appeared to have developed a warm personal chemistry. Canadian Political Counselor Andre Charbonneau attributed the strong chemistry to the fact that the two leaders are close in age, ideology, and political experience. He predicted that with Calderon about to begin a six year term, and with Harper riding high in the polls, the two leaders could become long-term allies. He said the Canadians were surprised Calderon did not raise either the issue of the liberalization under NAFTA of trade in corn and beans, scheduled to go into effect in 2008, or the North American Development Fund. He said Calderon expressed his interest in finding areas in which to expand the scope of both NAFTA and the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP).

¶3. (SBU) Calderon apparently made an equally favorable impression on his interlocutors outside the executive branch. Canadian opposition legislators were impressed that he made the effort to meet with them separately, as well as his skill during those meetings in engaging all the attendees in the conversation. He delivered a very well-received speech to a group of Canadian business executives; the executives appeared impressed by his energy and command of the issues.

The Wall

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¶4. (C) Although much of the Mexican press coverage of the

visit focused on Calderon's public comments about the proposed fence on the U.S.-Mexican border, the Canadians noted with surprise that Calderon himself did not raise the issue in his meeting with Harper. Rather, a Mexican journalist asked Calderon about the issue at their joint press appearance after the meeting. When asked, Calderon harshly criticized the measure, comparing it to the Berlin Wall. For his part, Harper commented vaguely on the issue, noting that the GOC shared the USG's concern for safe and secure borders, even as it opposed "things that cause unnecessary barriers to trade and ordinary exchange of tourism." (Note: Our Canadian counterparts told us Harper did not intend his comments to be seen as support for Calderon's position, although some in the Mexican media have characterized them as such. End note.)

#### Other Canadian-Mexican Issues

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¶5. (C) Charbonneau noted that Calderon's visit followed closely on the October 23-24 Canada-Mexico Interparliamentary Meeting in Ottawa. At the meeting, the Mexican delegation expressed strong support for initiating annual, three-way, North American legislative meetings. It also proposed establishing smaller interparliamentary commissions to address in detail specific issues of common interest.

¶6. (C) On an unrelated issue, the Canadians told us that Canada-Mexico bilateral security and defense cooperation talks would take place November 6 in Mexico City. They said the Mexican delegation would be led by SRE Undersecretary Geronimo Gutierrez, with a diverse delegation traveling from Ottawa to participate. He added that the Calderon transition team supported the talks and likely would send an observer.

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Among the issues to be covered are hemispheric security, Iran and North Korea.

Comment: Playing to the Home Audience

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¶7. (C) Calderon's focus on optics over substance in his Canadian visit confirms our impression that his pre-inaugural travels are directed far more to his home audience than to the foreign leaders with whom he has met. With defeated challenger Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador planning to inaugurate himself as Mexico's "legitimate president" on November 20, Calderon is eager to seize every available opportunity to enhance his stature and legitimacy at home. Nevertheless, his Ottawa visit certainly won him fans in Canada, which will serve him well once he assumes office.

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